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O'Brien, Morgan Joseph

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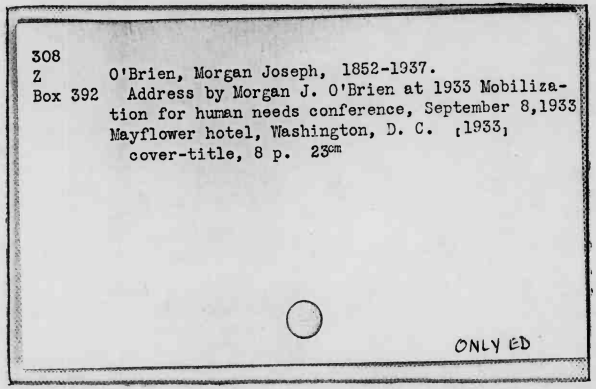
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ADDRESS

by

MORGAN J. O'BRIEN

at

1933
MOBILIZATION FOR HUMAN NEEDS
CONFERENCE

308
Z
Box 392

SEPTEMBER 8, 1933
MAYFLOWER HOTEL
WASHINGTON, D.C.

HEW Mar 31, 1933

ADDRESS

by

HONORABLE MORGAN J. O'BRIEN

This is an inspiring occasion when on the invitation of the President and Mrs. Roosevelt we have met and will attempt to bring home to our people the need for a generous response to community appeals by private charities throughout the country.

This Committee will seek to cooperate with local fund raising bodies in a preparatory campaign of education. What we must seek to accomplish is to arouse every citizen from his lethargy and ask him to "stop, look and listen". As President Roosevelt stated in signing the relief bill: "I want to make it very clear to citizens in every community that the bill I have just signed, authorizing an appropriation of $500,000,000 of Federal funds for unemployment relief, does not absolve states and local communities of their responsibility to see that the necessities of life are assured their citizens who are in destitute circumstances. 'The bill, in effect, is a challenge to governors, legislators and local officials to stimulate their own efforts to provide for their own citizens in need. For these and other good reasons, citizens who are able, should voluntarily contribute to the pressing need of welfare services' ".

We can and must succeed—if we are fortunate enough in securing the attention of our people to the important and inspiring words of our President supplemented by Mrs. Roosevelt in her uplifting message to members of the National Women's Committee, which she truly says "sets forth the task and the opportunity".

We know there is a clear line of cleavage between public and private relief. The limitations of public charity are known. Inasmuch as it supplants appeals to the individual conscience by the imposition of a tax, it inflicts a mortal injury upon the spontaneity of charity and the sense

of personal responsibility towards the unfortunate. Though the National and State and local governments have appropriated large sums for certain relief, notably to help the unemployed, this but emphasizes the necessity of seeing to it that private charitable institutions are supported.

We cannot stand idly by and (as pointed out by Mr. Baker) witness the fact that hospitals, because of a lack of funds, are closing their doors or limiting their services, that nurses whose services are provided by communities are struggling with loads they cannot carry; that orphanages are closing or find it necessary to refuse children, that institutions for the protection and guidance of youth are breaking down at a time when they are most needed.

Charity is not to be performed as under the compulsion of law, but freely and spontaneously. The field for charity is neither small nor likely to become smaller. We must therefore appeal to the millions who have work and the means of livelihood to become "partners of the poor" in every community. Industrial recovery will still make it necessary to continue our welfare agencies.

In the struggle of the human race for progress, and in the history of civilization in different ages and different countries, will be found the influence of great movements or great principles which have controlled and shaped the efforts of man for higher and better life.

When we read of the marvelous material growth of the great Oriental Empires—Egypt, Assyria and Persia—each in turn swaying the destiny of man; or look at cultured Greece, or study the last and greatest of all the ancient empires—Rome—we are forcibly struck with the giant strides they made, not only in material but in intellectual advancement, an intellectual advancement which has never been surpassed.

But amidst all this material splendor and intellectual progress, we shall look in vain for the existence of a single charitable institution for the unfortunate or afflicted. And were it not that the reason is easily found, it would be remarkable that in so many different nations, reaching such

an advanced state of civilization and noted for their progress in other directions, nothing was ever done to succor the unfortunate or help the weak, decrepit and infirm. We know, however, that it was due to a policy which regarded the individual as nothing and the State as everything, and, to the end that the State should only be concerned with those who could assist in bearing arms or in extending its power, the physically imperfect and the unfortunate were put to death or sold into slavery. And thus for the principle of charity the ancients substituted homicide, infanticide and slavery.

How complete the change upon the advent of Christianity. With the advancement of its principles step by step went the erection of houses and institutions for the relief of every form of human misery. And when Christian communities had been raised to the dignity of states, and in time overspread the habitable globe, in place of the Pagan idea that the individual was nothing and the State was everything, was substituted the benign principle which recognized that each individual is connected, not only with what transpires around him here, but is finally destined to immortality. Down the ages this principle has come. Its monuments in one direction are to be found in those magnificent charitable and eleemosynary institutions which attest the zeal and self-sacrifice of noble lives. And when we contrast this picture of noble lives and splendid institutions for the alleviation of the unfortunate and afflicted with what went before it, we have achievements as related to the progress of mankind which are greater and more enduring than the triumphs in sculpture, eloquence or poetry, which the most distinguished of the ancients achieved.

Charity, or the principle of love and brotherhood, has always seemed to me one of the features that marked the distinction between Pagan and Christian civilization. The progress made in the march of civilization in modern times is in nothing more significant than in the recognition of individual rights and duties. Each life plays some part in the great moral and spiritual world. The history of man-

kind "in its largest sense is a unit; its epochs form but acts in one grand providential drama; one thread of progress binds nation to nation, and, looking at humanity as a whole, we see that

> Through the ages one unceasing purpose runs,
> And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns."

The mighty nations of the past have come and gone, crumbled into sand as rocks by the sea, and they teach no lesson except that of the weakness of human upbuilding; and their effect upon the progress of the race is only important to the extent that they may have represented a principle or an influence that has survived to act upon subsequent ages. It would be impracticable to enumerate, even if with certainty we could determine, the controlling currents which have flowed from the past into our own civilization.

First and most important in our political life was the influence of the great principle of Democracy. Democracy, that great social leveler, which aroused the people from the sleep of ages, which shook the throne of tyrants, which established the rights of man, culminated in America in the establishment of the freest and best government the world has ever known. Democracy recognized that all men are created equal and should be free, and that there is no distinction except that which is furnished by the talents and character of each; and by making each the architect of his own fortune and giving him an equal opportunity to compete for the prizes of wealth and position, inaugurated a great modern industrial movement, which gave wings to creative genius and thus brought us those wonderful machines and inventions which in turn have produced a wealth exceeding in reality the dream of Aladdin.

One of the necessary results of the forces moving in this mechanical age and country, is the driving of the people from the country and the farm to the city; and with the growth of population and the tendency to have factories nearer the center of demand, which means nearer the centers of population, the result has been to bring those

who are attracted by the convenience of living or the luxuries of life, as well as the laboring man in search of employment, into the city.

We can, therefore, with reasonable certainty, conclude that as the civilization of any age or country is the result of the movements or activities of the greater portion of the population, the civilization of the future will be the product of the city.

The age is an extraordinary one, marked by nervous unrest and unrelenting activity.

"The life, the industry, the culture of the future will be urbanized. The modern city marks an epoch in our civilization. Through it a new society has been created. Life in all its relations has been altered. A new civilization has been born, a civilization whose identity with the past is one of historical continuity only. The modern city marks a revolution in industry, politics, society and life itself. Its coming has destroyed a rural society whose making has occupied mankind since the fall of Rome."

Were there not another side to this picture, it might well make us think with the poet, that "God made the country but man made the town."

It has been said that we are a profligate nation because spend-thrifts not only of our natural resources, but of our physical and mental energies as well. We are money-reckless, work-reckless, ambition-reckless, play-reckless, social-reckless, according to our spheres and our callings. We are cutting down our forests and our nerves, exhausting our mines and our mettle, piling our speculations and our aspirations to the tottering point. Literally in the heat of the day, we take no thought for the morrow. It is not the sane life any more that it is the simple life.

A fact which stands prominently forth in our history is that virtue has decreased in proportion to the destruction of the religious sentiment among our people, and it requires no prophet to tell what must be the inevitable end if some check to the rapid inroads of Socialism and materialism be not found. Kingdoms, empires and republics,

some of which in territorial aggrandizement were larger than our own; some obtaining an intellectual supremacy which yet commands the admiration of the world; have at times glistened along the past, only to be extinguished and to fade as utterly as the vivid glories of sunset. We know that more of man's destiny has been committed to our country than to any other nation in Christendom. But we also know that nations, like men, "may live to the fullness of their time or may perish prematurely for want of guidance or through internal disorders."

All thoughtful men value the inestimable blessings conferred by religion in developing the men who hewed out of impenetrable forests a country, a government and a constitution that is the envy of the world, and which, in its integrity, if preserved, assures not only to the present but to ages unborn the divine rights of civil and religious liberty. Our great achievements, our phenomenal growth, our long list of illustrious heroes, were the result of the religious spirit abiding in our people, and which found expression "in an admirable public conscience, rich in maxims of sublime morality, in laws of justice and equity, in sentiments of honor and dignity, in a profound respect for man and all that belongs to him, in a tendency to improve the condition of the many, to protect the weak and succor the unfortunate, in the indelible stamp which it has affixed on all our laws and all our institutions, and which has given us a civilization superior to that of all other civilizations, ancient or modern."

The late Dr. Chapin, a great and good man, said: "It is well to recognize the fact that the moral sanctions of the universe move steadily forward; that their rewards and their retributions girdle communities as well as individuals; that the gain which is bought with corruption and the luxury which is steeped in vice, and the prosperity which takes away the thought of God, embosom the seeds of ruin; that material greatness alone, strengthened by all the inventions of the time cannot prop up a state; that prosperity is not an enduring or saving good; that nothing endures or saves but truth and virtue and justice. Such is

the deep moral lesson that unfolds itself in the city we now look upon—such is the moral significance of the cities that have crumbled away."

The greatness of a city or of a nation does not depend upon the extent of its territory, the amount of its population or its material grandeur; but more upon its intellectual ideals, and more still upon the existence of moral principles which are alone the forces that in the end make for the progress and civilization of man.

"One great principle will tell more upon the life of a nation" than all its discoveries and conquests. Its character and history will be decided not by its geographic conformation, but by its ideals. And our own America, which reaches from ocean to ocean, crowned with its many stars, is not a mere territory on the map, a material weight among nations, but a sentiment we will trust and believe, a sentiment to go abroad to other people and into other climes caught from the apostles of liberty and the champions of human rights.

It is the duty which we owe to our country and generation, it is an obligation which is imposed upon us by the presence of the great problems we are facing, to see to it that those things which are of lasting advantage shall be neither lost sight of nor obscured. Nor should we ever forget the effect and dominating influence of charity which was the foundation of our Christian civilization and which was the distinguishing feature between it and the other civilizations that the world has known.

This is one of the numerous inducements that should move us to join in this partnership with the poor and afflicted. The heart and impulse of every true man and woman naturally impels us to give to those afflicted and suffering.

This sentiment is so strong that many to avoid being affected by it will remove themselves and refuse to listen to the cries of the distressed and suffering. Our work is to bring the truth home to such. All we desire from our fellow citizens is to have them harken to the impulses of

patriotism, wisdom and religion which we hope to bring to them and upon which we would like them to ponder. We want them to know that our Government, under the leadership of our President, is seeking to bring about not only industrial and economic recovery and the relief of unemployment, but is equally concerned in bringing food, raiment and relief to those who are suffering and are afflicted. In following him we are performing a patriotic duty because what he is endeavoring to accomplish would result in the continuity and security of our great country.

We seek, therefore, to have all listen to the appeal of our President and to carry the note that has been sounded by his admired, accomplished and helpful consort and wife in her appeal to the women.

In dwelling upon the incentives for our educational work, religion presents many reasons why upon highest grounds of humanity every one should be interested in supporting the great virtue of charity. Should we need inspiration or incentives from that source, what could be more striking and beautiful than the gospel which gives us the sublime picture of the good Samaritan. That parable is naturally vivid in our minds, but what I wish to particularly stress is what appears to have been said by the Saviour when the tempting lawyer asked what he must do to possess eternal life. The answer was that he should love the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his strength and with all his mind; and to love his neighbor as himself. Upon these divine utterances depend all religion and all gospels.

As said by the great Apostle in his epistle defining charity "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, and now there remain, faith, hope and charity: these three, but the greatest of these is charity".

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